Robert Schlapp – or ‘Robin’, as all his many friends called him, was born in Edinburgh on July 18th 1899 of German parents who had arrived and settled in Edinburgh in 1887. Robin’s father Otto Schlapp almost immediately gained a reputation teaching German and as soon as 1894 the University of Edinburgh established a lectureship for him and later a Department which he headed as the Professor of German until his retirement.

Robin finished College in 1917 with the highest honours and, after serving in the army with the war still continuing, he embarked on the Honours MA course of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy at Edinburgh University. This course was shared by the two Departments of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy, the former having (Sir) Edmund Whittaker, the latter the aging Charles Barkla, as Professors. Robin’s total record over the three years of studies was so unblemished that his acceptance in Cambridge was unassailable.

Robin was accepted by St. John’s College and by the University as a Research Student, and he enrolled for the Ph.D. He was possibly the first student assigned to Sir Joseph Larmor for supervision. Robin describes his stay in Cambridge as not particularly rewarding and Larmor as shy and not very inspiring. The subject that Larmor had suggested to him was “The Reflexion of X-Rays from Crystals” – it was precisely the subject for which Barkla gained his Nobel Prize. The examiners deemed Robin’s work worthy, and the assessment of its quality was proven by its appearance in the Philosophical Magazine.

A happy fact about Robin’s last year in Cambridge was that the great Paul Dirac was admitted to the same College as Robin, St. John’s. On a mention of the name Schlapp many years later Dirac’s eyes lit up, indicating warm memories. As Dirac was a very withdrawn, shy man of very few words no other explanation seems possible than that Robin must have been acceptable to him to share the regular Sunday morning walks that Dirac was famous for. This friendship was sufficient for us in Edinburgh to win Dirac to give a Robin Schlapp Lecture, an event that was instituted at the time of Robin’s retirement. It was the only other time the two old gentlemen met again.
However, in Robin's life there is quite a different further linking thread. In the summer of 1924 at the end of Robin's Cambridge period he was entitled to do some travelling. He chose to spend a period in Göttingen where a galaxy of authorities in Theoretical Physics were offering a series of lectures. Among them was a local Ordinarius, Max Born, who was later to play an important part in Robin's life. Just one year later was the *annus mirabilis* of the birth of Quantum Mechanics, begun by Werner Heisenberg who, as an assistant of Max Born in Göttingen, took the first step in the comprehension of the structure of the atom. Though Paul Dirac was at the time a mere novice research student, his Research Supervisor received a private communication from Max Born on Heisenberg's new ideas long before publication. The Supervisor sought help from his phenomenal young student, Dirac – and before long the Quantum Mechanics idea was enlarged and reinforced.

A new scheme of Commonwealth Fellowships had been created and Robin already had an offer of one to spend several years at Yale University, but in his own home of Edinburgh there had been changes of great interest to Robin. The University decided to found a Chair in mathematical physics